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SUBJECT: Toronto Police File First Human Trafficking Charges

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please Protect Accordingly.

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Toronto Police have filed multiple human trafficking and prostitution-related charges against six Toronto residents of Ukrainian and Russian descent. The charges are the first time Toronto Police have laid charges under 2005 laws specifically criminalizing human-trafficking related offenses. In statements after the arrests, Toronto authorities asserted that adequate structures are in place to protect human trafficking victims, but admit that the underground nature of the offenses makes apprehension and prosecution difficult. While the current charges are based on the accusations of two women who escaped their captors and fled to a police station, Toronto authorities suspect that as many as 6-10 other victims may be held as part of the scheme. END SUMMARY.

From Romania and Russia with Fake Israeli Passports

2. (SBU) The case broke on the evening of January 10, when a Romanian woman walked into the 52 Division of the Toronto Police Service (less than 200 yards from the Consulate General) and informed police that she was being forcibly held and forced to perform prostitution services. Shortly thereafter, Toronto police located a Russian national held at a downtown Toronto residence. Both women had been in Canada less than one year. According to police reports, the women traveled to Canada using falsified Israeli passports after being recruited under the pretense of performing "modeling" services. Once in Canada, their travel documents were confiscated, and they were forcibly confined except when being brought to clients (NOTE: Canada does not require visas for most visiting Israeli nationals. END NOTE).

3. (SBU) Acting on information provided by the two reported victims, Toronto Police arrested six Toronto residents, four men and two women between the ages of 35 and 52. All are of Russian and/or Ukrainian descent. Three are recent immigrants to Canada and could be deported if convicted of the prostitution and trafficking charges. The Canadian refugee claim of one of the Russian nationals was previously denied but he later reentered the country after his Ukrainian wife (who has also been charged in the case) filed a successful immigration petition. The names of the accused have been forwarded to Toronto's Consular section for entry in relevant lookout databases. At this point, there is no apparent U.S. connection to the investigation.

4. (SBU) At press conferences immediately following the arrests, Toronto Police Service officials speculated that as many as 10 further victims could be under confinement in the Toronto area and issued a public plea for victims to come forward. However, as of January 28, and after two court appearances by the accused, no further victims have been located. The federal Royal Canadian

Mounted Police (RCMP) has been assisting Toronto Police with the investigation. The victims have been referred to Citizenship and Immigration Canada for immigration and residency benefits available to victims of human trafficking.

First Use of Human Trafficking Statutes in Ontario

15. (SBU) While prostitution-related arrests are not uncommon in Toronto -- a town with a flourishing adult entertainment industry -- the January arrests are only the second time charges have been laid under 2005 federal legislation specifically criminalizing human-trafficking related offences. In December, 2007 charges of human trafficking were dropped against a Montreal couple for lack of evidence. The six accused in the Toronto case are charged with "Engaging in Human Trafficking" and "Benefiting from the Proceeds of Human Trafficking" as well as various prostitution-related offences. According to the Toronto Police lead investigator, none of the accused had previously come to the attention of law enforcement.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the failure of past human trafficking investigations, the Toronto charges are a significant test of Canada's new trafficking statutes. Toronto Police acknowledge the importance of this case and have actively solicited the public for assistance with the investigation and prosecution. In conversations with Consulate staff, Toronto area human trafficking researchers were skeptical that the Toronto arrests were an indicator of improved enforcement and attention to human trafficking issues. Rather, our contacts say, Toronto Police received an extraordinarily lucky break when the first victim presented herself to police. As no further victims have been located nearly two weeks after the initial arrests, this seems to be a logical conclusion. END

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